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ABSTRACT

The paper, presented at the Pan Pacific Conference on the Education of Exceptional Children (Honolulu, Hawaii, February 9-12, 1971), concerns special education in Hong Kong. A brief summary of the general educational background in Hong Kong and its present stage of development is given. The aim of special education in Hong Kong, existing facilities, and current problems are discussed; and future plans for special education services are considered. (CD)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

by

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In this paper I am going to give you first of all a brief summary of the general educational background in Hong Kong and its present stage of development. Then I am going on to describe special education in Hong Kong, what facilities we have and some of the problems we have to face. Finally I am going to tell you something of our plans for the future and the way we hope to develop our special education services.

Although Hong Kong is 398½ square miles in area only approximately 75 square miles are immediately usable. The remainder is largely hillside or swamp, unsuitable for agriculture or other development. In recent years the population in this comparatively small space has increased very rapidly. In 1945 the population was just under 1 million. Today it is just over 4 million. Moreover, it is a very young population. It is estimated that 50% of this population are under the age of 21 and 30% under the age of 12, and only 6% over the age of 60. The rapid increase which was due to both immigration and to the high birth rate inevitably caused many major problems in the provision of adequate housing, medical services, welfare services and education. We have had large numbers to contend with without time for the long, slow build-up of social services possible in other parts of the world. Obviously in recent years the government over-riding concern has been to make the basic provisions in housing, hospitals and schools.

In education the first aim has been to provide six years of primary education in a government or aided school for every child of primary school age who seeks it. By March 1971 that target will have been achieved and 650,000 subsidized primary places will be available. The main aim now is to expand secondary education and provide government and aided places for 50% of the 12-14 age group by 1976 and for 100% by 1981. The majority of these places will be in schools which will provide integrated general education and vocational training of 3 years duration up to the age of 16. In the field of technical

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education, schemes are under consideration for the expansion of education at all levels. These will include a new polytechnic with 4,000 full time places. Some expansion of teacher training is also expected to be necessary as a result of the expansion in the secondary field.

Education in Hong Kong is not yet free nor compulsory. However in government and aided primary schools the fees are low. The standard fee now chargeable in government and aided primary schools in urban areas is U.S. 3.30¢ per annum. A scheme of fee remission in government and aided schools and a textbook and stationery grant for every free-place holder ensures that no child is deprived of a place in a public school solely through the inability of his or her parents to pay the fees and buy the prescribed textbooks and stationery. The aim, of course, is free education and now that a primary place is available for all who seek it proposals are being considered to introduce free education in 1971. Furthermore as a first step towards compulsory education proposals are being considered to give the Director of Education power to direct parents to send their children to school where this is desirable.

This then is the general educational background. We are nearly at the stage of free primary education and about to take the first step towards compulsory primary education. We hope to have three years secondary education for the 12-14 age group by 1981 and expansion will continue in the field of further and technical education.

Now I should like to turn to special education and tell you about provision in this field and the facilities we have. As in most countries, the first provisions for handicapped children in Hong Kong have been pioneered by religious bodies, voluntary organisations or private individuals. The first home for the blind was established by the Canossian Sisters in 1863, the second which followed fairly closely was established by the Hildesheimer Blind-Mission in 1897. The first school for the deaf was established by three local missionaries in 1935. The first hospital school was established by the Hong Kong Red Cross in 1954. The first school for mentally handicapped children was established by a group of parents in 1964.

Today there are thirty special schools. These include two schools for the blind, one residential and one both residential and day; one residential school and six day schools for the deaf; two residential schools and one day school for the physically handicapped, nine hospital schools; one residential school and one day school for spastics; two day schools for mentally handicapped children; and five residential schools for maladjusted and socially deprived children. Twenty-four of these schools receive financial assistance from the Education Department. Ten of these schools also receive financial assistance from the Social Welfare Department in respect of their boarding section and two receive financial assistance from the Medical and Health Department in respect of medical facilities.

In addition to the schools for the more severely handicapped, there are twenty-four special classes for slow learning children and two classes for partially hearing children in ordinary government primary schools. There are also over 200 less severely physically handicapped children under regular supervision in ordinary classes in ordinary schools, and some blind children and physically handicapped who have completed primary education in special schools are studying with ordinary children in ordinary schools.

In all categories except the blind there is a demand for school places. There is no compulsory registration of handicapped children in Hong Kong. A register of handicapped people is kept by the Social Welfare Department, but as this is voluntary it cannot be regarded as the incidence of handicap. From all indications it seems probable that the incidence is higher than in most western countries.

It was not until 1960 that the Education Department felt that it was meeting the demands for ordinary education well enough to give adequate attention to special education, and in that year a Special Education Section was established. Up to that time homes for handicapped children were more the concern of the Social Welfare Department, and three of them received subventions from that department. The Special Education Section is responsible for the supervision and inspection of all special educational facilities. It advises on organisation, curricula, teaching methods, provides diagnostic facilities, educational placement and remedial services and runs teacher training courses.

There are now 24 officers in the Section trained in the education of the blind, the deaf, the physically handicapped, the maladjusted, the slow learning, audiology, speech therapy, and educational psychology. All members have received training overseas, and provide professional advice in these fields to voluntary organisations, other government departments and parents.

In Hong Kong, the Director of Education is responsible for all matters relating to education in the Colony and for all schools whether government, government-aided or private. There are no special regulations for special schools under the Education Ordinance, but provisions for special schools are included in the Subsidy Code. Under these provisions a deficiency subsidy is paid which makes up the difference between approved recurrent expenditure and approved income. This means that special schools are assisted with teachers' salaries and special allowances. They also receive by way of subsidy part of the building costs,equipment and other capital costs. The Code also stipulates the size of classes and the ratio of teachers. The maximum size of classes is : 15 pupils per class for the blind and partially sighted; 10 pupils per class for the deaf and partially hearing; 20 per class for the slow learning; and 25 per class for the physically handicapped. The staff ratio is 1.2 teachers per class compared with 1.1 for ordinary classes. Handicapped children are admitted to special schools at the age of 4 compared with 6 for ordinary schools.

The general aim of special education in Hong Kong is to provide children suffering from some disability of mind or body, education necessary to develop them as well-adjusted individuals capable of leading a wholly or partially self-supporting life. The education of these children, therefore, follows that of ordinary children as closely as possible. Such education, whether in special schools or ordinary schools, is directed towards providing the basic learning skills which will enable them to find employment and to become contributing members of the community. The ordinary school syllabus is followed as closely as possible. Subjects studied are Chinese, Arithmetic, English, Social Studies, Domestic Science, Nature Study, Health Education, Art, Handwork, Music, and Physical Education. The medium of instruction is Cantonese in all special schools except one school for mentally handicapped children which provides a class for English speaking children. Boarding special schools also offer a wide range of

extra curricular activities aimed at broadening the experience of pupils attending these schools. All special schools are full day schools whereas ordinary schools operate in two sessions. Hours are generally from 9 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. or 4 p.m. Ordinary school term and holidays are observed. Subsidized special schools charge a fee of U.S. $3.20 per annum with 30% free places.

Teachers of handicapped children can now be trained locally by officers of the Special Education Section. Teacher training courses run by the Section include one-year in-service courses for teachers of the blind, the deaf, the physically handicapped and the slow learning. Members of the Medical and Health Department and the Social Welfare Department assist with lectures in their respective fields. Qualified teachers in subsidized special schools who have successfully completed these courses are paid a special allowance. Short introductory courses for teachers of special classes for slow learning children and seminars on speech therapy in the classroom for teachers in ordinary schools are held for interested teachers in special schools and ordinary schools. Over 120 teachers in special schools and 200 teachers in ordinary schools have so far received training through these courses.

Now I should like to tell you about our policy and how we have tried to achieve it. It is the policy of the government of Hong Kong to encourage voluntary organisations to expand facilities for the more severely handicapped. This is done by government assuming greater responsibility for financial assistance while leaving the administration in the hands of the sponsoring organisation. In the planning stage are schools for the deaf, the slow learning, the physically handicapped and the blind. All these schools are being built with financial assistance from government.

It is also our policy to place handicapped children whenever possible in ordinary schools so that they receive the fullest educational opportunity and get the fullest benefit from mixing with ordinary children in an ordinary environment. This is both economical and educationally sound because handicapped children need to be integrated with ordinary children as much as possible.

In order to implement this policy, the Special Education Section has placed much emphasis on the development of diagnostic facilities to ensure that handicapped children receive the type of education for which they are most

suited and to ensure as early detection of handicap as possible. An important area of expansion of the Special Education Section has been the establishment of a Speech and Hearing Centre. This Centre provides audiometric screening and speech screening for primary school children, audiologic testing for children with suspected hearing impairment, auditory training for preschool hearing-impaired children in order to prepare them for placement in ordinary schools and speech therapy for the speech-impaired. If a child is in need of medical or surgical treatment he is referred to an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist of the Medical and Health Department for advice. If a child is in need of a hearing aid but his parents cannot afford it, he is referred to the Social Welfare Department for financial assistance.

Other diagnostic services which the Section have developed during the past few years include psychological testing and guidance for children with learning or behaviour problems, educational placement for physically-handicapped children, remedial advice to children with learning difficulties, guidance to parents and advice to teachers on how to deal with handicapped children. If necessary, handicapped children are referred to medical specialists for further advice. Handicapped examination candidates for the Certificate of Education or Secondary School Entrance Examination are assessed by the Section and if necessary special arrangements are made. Children suspected of a handicap or a hearing problem can be referred by the parents, the teacher, the school authority, the medical practitioner, the social worker etc. to the Special Education Section for diagnosis and if necessary for remedial services.

Equal emphasis has been placed in the development of remedial services. Apart from the therapy provided for children suffering from speech and hearing defects the Section now operates 24 special classes for slow-learning children and 2 classes for partially-hearing children in ordinary government primary schools. It is planned to open 2 classes for partially-sighted children within this academic year. Teachers in these classes have been specially selected and are developing remedial methods, teaching techniques and special curricula for Cantonese speaking children. In addition more than 300 less severely physically handicapped children have been placed in ordinary classes in government and subsidized primary schools in Hong Kong. These children are regularly supervised by officers of the Special Education Section.

The Section also runs a braille printing press. Over 7,000 volumes of more than 100 types of books have been printed and supplied to schools. Schools pay only 10% of the cost, while the remaining 90% of the cost is borne by Government subsidy. As a result schools for the blind can purchase braille books at a cost comparable to that of the ink-print ones.

The provision of vocational training and employment for handicapped school leavers lies mainly in the province of the Social Welfare Department. The Special Education Section assists with the assesment of handicapped school leavers and refers them to this department for vocational training or placement. Main developments in recent years have been the establishment of vocational training centres for the handicapped.

In carrying out its policy the Special Education Section co-operates with the Medical and Health Department through its medical social workers and specialists in the referral and assessment of children and close co-operation has been established with paediatric, orthopaedic, psychiatric and ENT clinics. The Section co-operates with the Social Welfare Department in referral and vocational placement. This department also provides financial assistance for hearing aids to children whose parents cannot afford to buy them. Great efforts are being made by all concerned in special education in both voluntary organisations and government to build up a policy of co-operation and co-ordination of services.

Like all other places we have our problems. In addition to the many universal problems regarding special education, we in Hong Kong are confronted with many special problems peculiar to local conditions. Apart from a shortage of facilities and accommodation we suffer from a shortage of ground space, which makes the planning of special schools very difficult. As old Chinese saying, "A foot of earth is an inch of gold", very aptly depicts the situation. We have a shortage of training personnel, both teachers and therapists, although the situation is improving as the prestige of special education is growing. We also have a shortage of opportunities for employment as many employers still need to be convinced of the capabilities of a handicapped person.

Apart from the many general problems we have also several specific educational problems. These include syllabuses, curricula, teaching methods,

textbooks and technical equipment. For the less severely handicapped children in ordinary schools the keen competition for school places and the great pressure to maintain a place make additional demands. For the children in special schools the Chinese language with its complicated structure, tonal quality, differences between the spoken dialect and the written form presents additional difficulties. Furthermore, many of the established teaching techniques from western countries cannot be applied to Chinese children without adaptation. Local production of special teaching aids, technical equipment is limited and overseas production is often both expensive and unsuitable. Nevertheless these problems will have to be resolved if the special education programme in Hong Kong is going to achieve its aims and enable handicapped children to become wholly or partially self-supporting citizens.

In conclusion I would like to say something about our future plans and how we intend to progress towards adequate special educational provision for all children who need it. In March 1971 the first five year development programme for special education will have been completed. The main aims of this initial development programme were to make a start in providing accommodation for handicapped children in special schools or classes, to create advisory, supervisory and training services which could improve the standards in special schools, and to provide the basis for diagnostic and remedial services. To achieve these aims staff had to be trained and remedial methods and techniques suitable for Chinese children had to be established. As a result of this development programme by March 1971 there will be 4,000 government or aided places for handicapped children either available or in the planning stage, and in this academic year 17,000 children will be dealt with the diagnostic and remedial services provided by the Special Education Section.

The basic foundations of special educational treatment having been established it is now necessary to put them to proper use and ensure that future development of education for handicapped children progresses along modern lines. In the next five years our first aim will be to increase accommodation as much as possible and to ensure a wider range of facilities is available. This will include expansion of facilities in special schools, in special classes in ordinary schools, in ordinary classes with tutorial help and in ordinary classes without

tutorial help. In this way facilities will be available to meet the needs of every type of handicapped child and to ensure that handicapped children are integrated with ordinary children as much as possible.

The second and main aim in this second phase will be to increase preventive measures by providing through the Special Education Section more diagnostic and remedial services mainly in the fields of audiologic, psychological and speech therapy services. Expansion in these areas is of major importance because adequate assessment is essential for adequate placement and remedial measures are essential if a minor handicap is to be prevented from becoming a major disability. Provision of these services will also lessen the demand for special school places and ensure that the maximum benefit can be obtained from places available in special schools and classes. In order to achieve this aim we plan to increase the number of children being dealt with under the diagnostic and remedial services provided by the Special Education Section from 17,000 a year to 175,000 a year by 1976.

The third aim will be to ensure adequate standards of special educational treatment by ensuring adequately trained staff. This will require an expansion of teacher training programme involving overseas training for the nucleus of specialist staff, local in-service training for teachers in special schools and classes and courses on special educational treatment for teachers-in-training in colleges of education. At the same time it is hoped to obtain a wider spread of professional knowledge of the education of children in need of special education.

If these plans are fully implemented I very much hope that in the next five years we shall go a long way towards meeting the needs of handicapped children in Hong Kong. I hope, too, we shall have gone a long way towards ensuring that they are accepted as equal members of the community. This is essential if we are going to achieve the ultimate goal of special education which is equal opportunity for the handicapped. Otherwise any development policy is not worthwhile.